

The Tao Te Ching/The Tao of Love

Introduction

In order to understand the "Tao of Love", one must first understand the principles of "The Tao". The philosophy of the Tao comes from the book The Tao Te Ching, (pronounced Dow Deh Jing), commonly known as the "Book of the Way", by Lao-tzu. We know little about Lao-tzu except that he was probably an older contemporary of Confucius (551-479 B.C.E.) and may have held the position of archive-keeper in one of the petty kingdoms of the time. The Tao was written over 2,500 years ago. All that we really have left of Lao-tzu is his book.

Guiding principles of the Tao:

- We are all connected to the Universe, and to each other.
- "Go with the flow" – accept things as the way they are, and the way they are supposed to be ("hands-off").
- Have humility.
- Do not focus on material wealth or what others value.
- Have great compassion, even for "bad" people – good people are meant to teach them.
- Be free from desire, then you will be at peace.
- Act but don't expect; act without rushing.
- In conflict, be fair and generous.
- Don't compare or compete; care about other people's approval and you will be their prisoner. Don't be elated by praise or discouraged by neglect.
- Don't try to control – only master yourself – all things change.

- Keep things in balance.
- Be patient.
- Keep things simple.
- The wise don't need to prove their point; those who need to prove their point aren't wise.
- Give to others.
- Failure equals opportunity.
- Develop enough self-reliance to give up the idea of self.
- Step back from your thoughts.
- If words equal actions then they are genuine.
- Erase the blackboard – be something new!
- See everyone as your equal.
- When you realize you made a mistake, admit to it and correct it.
- Prevent trouble before it arises.
- See the larger picture.
- Change your future by changing your mind.
- We are not victims.

Ultimately, the Tao is about participating in society according to the natural laws of the universe so that we live in harmony with its processes and not in confrontation with them.

The Tao of Love

Now that we have the guiding principles of the Tao in our mind, let's examine how they apply to love. It has been said, "Life is like a parking garage: if you go backward, you get severe tire damage." First we will discuss the problems, and then offer solutions.

The "Problems"

Love is first about pain. Sounds promising, huh? But it's true. How can we know love without first knowing pain? It is the pain itself that creates our abilities to know love. For

a lot of people (I'd say most), being "in love" creates feelings of possible loss, jealousy, anxiety, fears of abandonment. These feelings of pain arise from feelings of lack of self-worth, and we feel that it is better to know the certainty of pain rather than the uncertainty of the new. I know there are some of you who will read this and say, "I don't feel a lack of self-worth, I am not jealous, I don't worry" and that could be true for you. But I think on some level most of us experience these types of fears. The lack of self-worth could simply mean that we don't feel safe. Perhaps this lack of feeling safe is a result of a childhood experience or environment. Our job is to break the patterns and create a new point of view for ourselves and start fresh, free from self-imposed oppression. We can and do create our own reality that we can begin to accept responsibility. By accepting responsibility, we become free, for then no one can challenge our security. What you feel you lack is already inside of you and you need but to find the most appropriate way to unlock your own secrets, your own potential.

The Issues

The Connection

Except for with our children, we join the lives of others in the midst of things. In the process of interacting with others, we pass on some of our own selves. Because of our feelings of insecurity, we tend to want to control the world and others in our attempt to feel safe.

Love is About Trust

Trust is about feeling safe about ourselves in relation to tomorrow. Trusting means letting go of the control that we have deceived ourselves into thinking we have.

Personal Faith

It is only because most of us lack faith that having faith is so important. True mastery can be gained by letting things go their own way. It can't be gained by interfering. "The intellectual brain can only dominate awareness by affixing itself to something definite and bounded." With the Tao, however, it is the very nature of the process that demands there be no such concrete guidelines. Making a deliberate choice to let go of a rational thought process seems a contradiction in terms. How can we consciously choose not to think? We must learn, consciously, to suspend our need to have rational answers for everything. Rational answers will come, of their own course and in their own time, when we have opened ourselves up to alternate ways of thinking.

How Can We Develop Faith?

Our attempts to control the world come from thinking that this security comes from an outside source that we must control. The faith needed is a faith that everything will turn out right. What we need means what we need for our growth and development. Having faith means we will not be afraid of the new. Fear leads to further attempts to control others in order to abate our feelings of fear. We all lack vision because since our beginnings, we have chosen simply to accept what those who came before us have believed. Struggle is an integral part of the process. If we look for evil, we will find it. What we each do is to first decide what the world is all about and then only secondarily seek reinforcement of that decision in the real world. We decide what the world is like based on our background. We must find a way to break the cycle of perception-breeds-reality by breaking the perception, not the reality. The great trick of life is to learn what the process is all about. It is to

understand how we get from seeing only misery and suffering to finding learning and wisdom from its lessons. We must learn faith that we are all one, that we are all part of the same planet. Faith is required for us to know that our fear is only about fear.

Balance, Harmony, and Change

The goal for our lives is to achieve a balance, a harmony, both within ourselves and in turn with nature and the natural processes that are ongoing in the world.

Attempting to fight the process of change involves struggles to make steady that which is inherently unsteady. The ability to see our lives from the inside, from the subjective, the feeling, and the participating perspective, while at the same time also being an outside, objective observer, may be the most important aspect of learning what trust and ultimately peace are truly all about. It is the belief in the presence of something significantly larger than ourselves that gives us that strength. It is necessary at times to feel almost like a sieve, touching the matters that pass through our lives but not attaching to them, for if we begin to feel as though the events were in themselves the things that matter, we would lose the benefits of the ability to let go.

Certainty in life is hardly ever possible and yet we spend virtually all of our time seeking the feeling of security we believe it brings. We can never work our way out of a problem by using the very same thinking that got us into the problem in the first place. When we feel insecure, rather than open ourselves up to new ideas to escape from that feeling, we in fact regress and turn inward and backward toward more of the same. So we go on, with all of our pain, with all of our fear, because it is at least knowable. Within

any crisis lies the opportunity for change.

Letting Go

Our destinies, while caught up inexorably with theirs, are still separate and apart. We can, each of us, enjoy our own levels of personal growth without feeling the need to restrict and contain the other's. We really have no choice, for in the end, the natural processes will prevail no matter what we do.

Love

True love does not hold but releases and gives freedom to another. True love cannot be complicated by rules, by control, by restrictions. By allowing ourselves to be loved by another, we must in the process be free of all ego. It is only when we learn to let go of ourselves and our need to be loved that we can find love. Many of us go through life having a number of relationships in which we think we are experiencing love, but it turns out what we really are feeling is not love at all but need. It is need born from lack of love when we were children, which need we carry with us all of our lives unless we are able to free ourselves of it – all that grasping, all that clawing, all that holding on, all that pain. That is all we know. Our frames of reference are limited by the remembrances of our past and our fears of the future.

Fear is Not Love

If we cling, if we grasp, we will destroy. We fear that losing the relationship would mean loss of ourselves. When we cling, it is out of a sense that if we let go, somehow we will lose a part of us. And that generally is so because we are not complete without the other. We need the other to make us whole so that if the other leaves, we are in fact

incomplete. So we hold on, trying to keep the other from doing or thinking anything that we feel will jeopardize the relationship and us. And the more we try to make that other ours, the more the other struggles to be free. And the more the other struggles to be free, the more we tighten our grasp. And neither of us knows what is going on until it is over. If, when we were children, we felt that our parents did not think we were worth loving, we simply carry that perspective into our later lives. It becomes self-fulfilling, for we find reasons to fail in love. When we expect something out of our relationship with another, then we will surely be disappointed, for loving means having no expectations. When we want the other to be a certain way, to fulfill certain of our expectations, and he or she does not, love turns to disappointment in us. To know that whatever comes of the relationship and this particular partner we will still be us is freeing.

Loving is Different From Being Loved

Allowing ourselves to be loved by another requires us to be completely out of control and vulnerable. Only when we have tried to control and when we have been unsuccessful and that has resulted in deep hurt can we even begin the process of learning from the hurt. It is ironic that the process of letting go and giving up control is also the process of taking on personal responsibility for ourselves. We are, by doing so, saying to ourselves that we, not something out there, not something over which we feel we have control, is determining our destinies. We are making the decision. We cannot let the other be free if we ourselves are in chains.

Happiness Comes from Freeing Ourselves of Fear

We truly can create our own reality, a reality that can be negative or

positive. It takes a lot of growing to feel good enough about ourselves to allow the other to be as free as we would like to be ourselves. It takes a great deal of personal strength to give the other the freedom to do whatever that other wants to do without feeling threatened by freedom. To give the other the room to grow, to experience things that may not be to our liking and that may even cause the relationship to change, takes a very positive feeling about ourselves.

Solutions

How Do We Change?

It is up to each of us to fill our well according to our own lives. It requires us to *be* our faith even in the face of "real world" daily stuff that gets in the way.

- Examine your pain. The pain is the original pain from childhood. Talk to yourself. Talk to this child, say how much you love this child, say he or she is safe. Take care of the child.
- It is vitally important that we become more accepting of ourselves. Our search for perfection is merely our trying to right the perceived inadequacies we feel we have, and those depend on our perspective from childhood. But the more we search for perfection, the more we build into our current perceptions the basis for continued self-deprecation.
- Examine your fears concretely. What is it that you really think will happen to you if you let go and break a pattern or two? Will you die or fall off the Earth? Make a list of what you fear and what you fear will

- happen to you. Seeing those fears, speaking about them, writing them down, forces you to get concrete about your fear and may help you to see them as irrational in many instances. In this process of exploration, try being alone more. Many of us fear being with ourselves and yet it is difficult to grow when we are surrounded by people, events, things that easily distract us.
- Examine your patterns.
 - We tend to repeat our behavior because to do so is a form of control. We believe that if we do not venture too far from what we know, no matter how boring, hurtful, and painful it is, at least we know what to expect. If we grew up believing we were not worthy, we fall into relationships that prove that to us over and over again.
 - Do whatever you do differently from the way you did it yesterday. Act as if you believed. One way to break this repetitive system is to act as if you felt good about yourself. You have the total and complete ability to be free, and in the process of being free to free yourself of the burdens of your past. After all, they have absolutely no relevance to your today, so just act as if you were strong and confident. Pretend. What happens is that if you do let go and act as if you were self-assured, the other person reacts accordingly. So then you are reinforced and get the courage to try it again.
 - Try small changes at first. Make a list of what you would like to be and feel, given the
- total freedom to be just that way. Make it concrete. Start with changes that are achievable so that you get "wins" right from the beginning.
- See the larger picture. When you want something and it is not happening the way you want it to happen, it is the universe telling you to back off and let go. What will happen will happen.
 - Examine your contributions. Feeling connected to the planet will give you a feeling of personal responsibility for your conduct and is empowering. We can change ourselves by doing for others since in doing so, we take ourselves out of our egocentric condition.
 - Meditate and do affirmations. We must learn to feel the presence of the universe, of God (or perhaps this just means your higher self if you are atheist or agnostic), inside each of us in order to feel connected. We can feel it only when we get quiet and be with ourselves alone.
 - Doing affirmations,
 - telling yourself repeatedly that you are safe,
 - that you are a good person,
 - that you deserve abundance in the world,
 - that you are worthy of love, may, over time, become part of your belief system.
 - We do create our own reality. Positive, affirming statements to ourselves help us create that reality.
 - Find some alternative philosophy to follow, Learn about astrology or Eastern

religions or anything else that opens you up to other ideas that you have not allowed in.

- Do what you love to do. If you dread Mondays through Fridays, you will not be open to relationships with others during that time or even on the weekends. You will be miserable and take it out on others. I know this is easier said than done. But one can make an effort to find employment that is less painful than a job that you detest. Remember, if we do not dream, then we die.

Conclusion

“Nothing will change until we change, for we are the somethings that must change.”

We can change our future by changing our minds. Because we fear freedom in our individual lives, we must restrict freedom for those whom we would love, lest the freedom they have be seen as a threat to our freedom. Without the promise of immediate results, we refuse to try anything. If our perspectives are toward self-love, there is nothing to fear.

I know a lot of these solutions are difficult to implement. Some I have, some I haven't. But the road to growth is in the attempt. I don't know about you, but I really identified with the issues and problems identified from the concept of the Tao of Love, and hope you did too. I wish you well on your road to a happier self.

Sources:

The Tao Te Ching, translated by Stephen Mitchell

The Tao of Love, Ivan Hoffman